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Remote work arrangements are here to stay

Alignment of expectations and resources becomes more critical to sustain success

BROOKLYN, Wisc. and WATERFORD, Wisc., July 30, 2020 – Over 75 percent of employers believe they need to implement new management policies and practices to accommodate remote working as a standard future practice, and employees are interested in more flexible working arrangements going forward, according to a recent study conducted by Timpano Consulting and Blue Rock WI, management consulting firms specializing in workforce optimization.

The research effort involved surveys, interviews, discussions, and critical analysis about the effect of the coronavirus pandemic on employers and employees. Over 100 individuals spanning sectors, industries, sizes, and position types shared perspective; ninety percent of respondents were based in Wisconsin.

“Remote working is here to stay,” said Brett Remington, Blue Rock WI president. “Employers who figure out how to shift management practices to focus on outcomes rather than activities will be better positioned to raise productivity and secure profits.”

While 63 percent of employers anticipated a negative impact on their year-end organizational performance as a result of the pandemic, 77 percent of employers reported the performance of their workforce in remote work arrangements was about the same or better compared to the beginning of the year. Forty-three percent of employees working remotely were more satisfied with their job performance compared to the beginning of the year, and 32 percent felt about the same in terms of performance.

Ten percent of employees working from home during the pandemic preferred to return to their workplace as soon as possible, yet 80 percent of employees wanted to keep the practice as long as it makes sense for them and their work or until COVID-19 is no longer identified as a public health issue. Employees ranged in terms of how frequently they would choose to work remotely, with half preferring 5 days or more per week, and half preferring a hybrid arrangement of a few days per week or per month. All employee respondents who were working at home during the pandemic believed they could comfortably do so for at least a few months, with 77 percent indicating six months or more.

“Few organizations expect to return to business as usual from last year,” said Melanie Schmidt, Timpano Consulting president. “Employers must figure out how to best utilize their workforce to rebound and deliver value for customers – be that in person, remotely, or some sort of hybrid.”

Overall, employees are ready to adapt when given more flexibility, support to succeed, and clarity around expectations. Surveyed supervisors and managers welcome training and support to deliver on it.

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The future has its challenges – but they can be addressed. Employers and employees shared concerns about the work-related challenges caused by internet connectivity (broadband access) and it being harder to communicate with coworkers. Yet, employers overestimated the challenges of distractions at home and underestimated employee anxiety about how they may be personally affected by the coronavirus.

Other Survey Findings:

- At the beginning of the year, only 30 percent of employers surveyed used remote working as routine practice, though 94 percent shifted to it during the pandemic. Looking ahead, about 10 percent intended to return fully to a ‘traditional’ workplace with 58 percent intending to deploy a hybrid model and 23 percent still unclear about how they would approach future work arrangements.
- Seventy-five percent of employees expressed confidence that they had the right resources to navigate through the crisis response, and 75 percent were confident in their leadership teams to make the right decisions through the crisis.
- Over half of employee respondents reported working more hours than before the pandemic; eight percent reported working fewer hours.
- Public sector employers expect remote work arrangements to be in the mix; most private sector employers intend to increase remote working while some functions return to the traditional setting; and, most nonprofit employers are likely to introduce more remote work opportunities.
- Across all sectors, employees want more outcomes-focused management and clearer expectations in terms of their accessibility and responsiveness. They also desire weekly communications from their leadership teams for how the organization is handling business complications due to the coronavirus.

The pandemic surfaced issues already existing within organizations. According to Schmidt and Remington, best-in-class organizations listen to their employees when formulating their strategies rather than instituting practices based solely upon others’ experiences, broad research reports, or management team assumptions. They observe that every organization’s workforce is comprised of different ideas about what will work best, and employers won’t be able to satisfy everyone so they must work toward solutions that deliver the greatest value to their mission and find ways to help employees navigate the changing times.

Interviews and discussions occurred in June with the survey conducted for a week in mid-June. A copy of the full report is available online at https://bit.ly/WorkforceStrategies_0720report.

Timpano Group includes a cross-sector strategy consulting firm that helps mission-driven organizations build capacity and achieve outcomes with processes that engage stakeholders to achieve sustainable transformation. More information can be found online at <https://www.timpanogroup.com>.

Blue Rock WI works with organizations interested in closing the gap between their performance and their potential. Services deliver enterprise-based performance improvement by simplifying the complex, focusing on achievement, and igniting passion for purpose across sectors. More information is available online at <http://www.bluerockwi.com>.

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NOTES: Melanie Schmidt and Brett Remington are available for individual or joint interviews. Ms. Schmidt can be contacted at (608) 695-7320; Mr. Remington can be contacted at (262) 893-5971.

Highlights from the report will be shared at a virtual public event on Thursday, August 6, 2020, at 1:30PM. The 45-minute presentation is free, with registration required via <https://bit.ly/futureworkforce0806>